



Journal on  
Music, Dance,  
Fine Arts

# PHOENIX

Vol. 1 No. 2 Rs. 10



NIRUPAMA RAJENDRA

A *Bappco* publication by THE BANGALORE PRESS

*Await the Next issue of*

# PHOENIX



## "MUSIC'S MILLENNIUM"

Compendium of writings by well-known scholars on  
epoch-making movements that have enriched  
the Art and Science of Indian Classical Music

### PHOENIX

Vol. 4

No. 2

May 1999

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Printed and published by

H.R. Ananth  
for THE BANGALORE PRESS  
No. 88, Mysore Road  
Bangalore - 560 018

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## Dance Stage

Theatre techniques in recent times have changed considerably. Today one can see specialisation in each aspect of production. The stage itself has not remained unaffected by these revolutionary changes. Gone are the days when elaborate props highlighted the locale of a play. A few cut-outs here and some pieces of purposeful furniture there would suffice to create the ambience. Symbolism rules the roost, confining the ubiquitous painted curtains to the professional, company drama as they are rolled

The credit for introducing this new trend must go entirely to the renowned physical culturist and litterateur K.V. Iyer. As the president of the now defunct Ravi Kalaridasa, Iyer directed a number of productions for the amateur group. They were staged in his airy Vayamashala, each production devoutly subscribing to the Shakespearean dictum "The play is the thing".

Iyer himself was dominantly influenced by an equally illustrious showman — the famed Bhuruthumtyam exponent Raja Gopal. When around 1938 the latter presented a long-time dance performance soon after his return from a tenacated dance tour of the Continent on the outbreak of the Second World War, for the first time the audience accustomed to ornate stage settings, was greeted by the simple western ballet stage. Our set overlooking a plain, unostentatious stage with no more than a thick, black blue curtain as the backdrop. It was easy to appreciate how the focus under the circumstances would entirely be on the performer, allowing no room for any distracting whatsoever.

As far as the drama is concerned, the technique has prevailed with minor modifications, the efforts, if any, not going beyond the symbolic needs. But, alas, this is not the case in respect of the dance stage, which is seemingly becoming more and more ornate. Though some suggestive, even ostentatious decor is not undesirable for a dance-drama or a dance feature, it is difficult, rather uncomfortable, to reconcile with 'saunter effects' in a Bhuruthumtyam solo or 'sahit' catches where the focus has to be the dancer and dancer alone. All such decorations, including the banner of the sponsor, often the head of the dancer jostling with its bright surface, with letters galore could distract the concentration of the audience, as much as the dancer herself. Only recently, in a Bhuruthumtyam recital at the ADA Rungamandira, the setting was a monumental example of how distracting such ostentatious could be. Besides the innumerable floral pin-ups and droops covering the entire stage, a Nataraj idol installed in a huge, white 'maatapi' in the background solidly stood in the way of aesthetic perception. No wonder the dancer appeared out of focus right through her 100 minute ecstacy!

The experience in the just concluded "Ankur-99" festival organised by the Karnataka Nrityakala Parishath was no different. The pinkish background appeared rather garish, to say the least, the colours of the dancers' costume often obfuscating the perception. More maesthetic was the name sheet of the festival marring the backdrop. Whenever a dancer's face came in juxtaposition of its white surface, the friends got completely lost in the ensuing merger. High time that our sponsors stopped insisting on their paraphernalia marring the backdrops. More importantly, the coming dance stages are provided with the tested blue curtains for a backdrop the better for dance, dancer and dancerly perception, any deviation reduced to the minimum.

J.S.N. Chandrasekhar

## Kathak Spells Magic in Swiss Hearts

ight understanding of our classical arts (particularly dance, being our field), its deep perceptions and unique qualities enable the artiste to feel so special that he/she feels proud of being a part of such a great heritage. It gives so much joy to share this special feel with audiences who are sensitive to our arts

and culture, be it in India or abroad. Having widely travelled the world for over 12 years, we have come across audiences from all walks of life, race, caste, colour and creed and each tour has been a new experience.

### A Delight

Dancing to European

audiences is a delight as their value of our arts and culture is something which is reflected in the spontaneous response during a performance. It is well-known that the Greeks, Spanish, English, French, Germans have greatly contributed to the field of literature, Fine arts, Music, Dance and Theatre. Their sensitivities to Indian arts and culture, specially related to mythology and epics is so good, that at times, we have bits to pick from them!

Our recent tour of Switzerland turned out to be a whirlwind of cultural activities spread over a month. The schedule included performances, dance workshops, both Bharathanatyam and Kathak, demonstrations and sessions with local dance teachers and performers.

### Performances:

Kathak and Bharathanatyam items were presented for various organisations. Our performances (particularly Kathak) had the right blend of Abhinaya and Nritya, opening with a brief introduction of the style and illustrations of the suggestive gestures for the words in the composition. Stories from Ramayan, Mahabharatha and other epics fascinated the viewers



Nirupama – Rajendra in a striking Kathak Stance

throwing light on the aspects of pure dance. Here we repeat a fine line of Natya Sastra :

When the sages questioned Bharatha about the purpose of dance, he gave a significant reply : "Dance does not require any meaning. It has been created for the simple reason that it is beautiful. It is the very nature of things that all people find dancing beautiful."



*The Popular Kathak Duo*

With these inspiring words we were dancing with great joy and it was one beautiful world of the dancer and the viewer, drawing each other closer towards ecstasy, with thankful thoughts of our gurus, musicians and well-wishers deep down in the heart.

It was moving to see how our music and dance could bring tears of joy to the Swiss... Maybe somewhere they could feel the sparks of the physical energy and spiritual power deeprooted in our classical tradition. Apart from the Swiss, German, French, Italian, Afghan and Sri Lankan audiences, there were Indians

of cultured background coming from different parts of India who had responded wonderfully to the performances.

### On Swiss Television

For the first time, Indian dance was featured in a special programme on Swiss television channel on the occasion of North South Festival. We performed a Jugalbandi of Bharathanatyam and Kathak along with the outstanding dancer-teacher Sujatha Venkatesh (Originally from Bangalore, disciple of U.S.Rs) and Marina Gerasa, both from Geneva. The special guest of the evening was Mr. Farooq Abdullah—Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir.

### A Few Reflections

"After watching you dance, we feel so charged and lively....."—A Swiss student.

"We have lived in Lucknow for many years. We haven't seen anything like this....."—An Indian Family

"I wonder if you are real.....I was lost in another world....."—A Swiss Indian dancer.

"We have seen you for three years, every time you bring so much more and so better..." A welcome comment as our growth was felt at both ends.

### Teaching Sessions

The more energy giving activity was teaching... something which we both love and the receiving end consisted of students of all



*Nirupama strikes  
A Bharatanatyam stance*

abilities. There were total beginners, dancers with experience, and dance teachers of Indian and contemporary dance styles. They would all be there in the workshop and it

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was a task to cater to all these in the same class as some were present with therapeutic interest, some for learning technique and theory, a few to understand Indian culture through arts and some others to expand their repertoire.

Our efforts involved in building up of stamina and skill through exercises, movements to meet the demands of the pure dance technique, to create life in every movement, emphasis on beauty and grace in the technique, introduction to tala system, the hasthas and usages (the simple ones) and the variations in emotions (a must for a foreigner).

Well...not that it is easy to achieve all these in limited classes, but definitely it motivates the participants to achieve the targets. At the end of the workshop we noticed a change in their approach to dance—a stepping stone for development.

We were all around conducting workshops at popular theatre centres, Jazz and contemporary dance schools, Indian dance centres at Geneva, Zurich, Berne & Neuchâtel. The more we taught, the more we learnt.....I guess that's the best part of teaching.

### Some Impressions

"We didn't know that Kathak had such beautiful ang(movements) of the limbs.....It is so relaxing to the body and the mind....."—A Thai-chi dancer learning the

Bencaras style of Kathak, Geneva.

"Your Kathak is so expressive"—Nathalie, Kathak teacher, Geneva.

At this point, we express our gratitude to our dear Guru Maya didi for her great contribution to Kathak in the aspects of graceful ang and abhinaya.

In conclusion we would like to mention one more remark of a dancer, a disciple of Guru Adyar Lakshmanan of Chennai, "I am so happy to see

these Swiss girls dance continuously for four hours with ynn.....there is something which has transformed them".

Well, it is the spirit of our classical dance, our Indian arts, which can create such magic. Though we have miles to go and explore the dance forms, it will always be a pleasure for us to spread this light all over the world, to repeat.

"Classical dances are our country's proud Heritage"

## City Artistes Feature in Jazz Fest

Sonaja Babu

Legendary American Jazz Saxophonist Charlie Mariano and his group "Bangalore" which comprises of 3 musicians from Bangalore—acclaimed Carnatic Vocalist R.A. Ramamani, Mridangam maestro T.A.S. Muni and well-known jazz fusion guitarist Amit Heri will recently performed at 15 international jazz festivals spread over Germany, Austria, France and Switzerland in May and June 1999.

This is in response to last year's resounding success of their performance at the prestigious Berlin Jazz Festival and other venues in Germany (incidentally they have been invited within 5 months of their last tour). Charlie Mariano released his jazz fusion album "Bangalore" internationally last year. The album (produced by intuition Records, Germany) features 2 composition each of R.A. Ramamani and Amit Heri.

On this tour "Bangalore" is Charlie Mariano (Saxophonist), R.A. Ramamani (vocal), Amit Heri (guitar), Dave King (Bass) and T.A.S. Muni (Mridangam).

They will perform at the Moers Jazz festival (one of the biggest in Europe), Stuttgart Theatrehaus Festival, Newerl Jazz Festival, Jazz Festival at Halle, Rotweil Festival, Delmenhorst Jazz Festival, Karlsruhe Festival and others.

# Melody Makers All

**F**or the Bangalore musical buff the Sri Ramanavami season is similar to the December musical festivities in Chennai. It is a musical fiesta with a bang for us. Almost every locality celebrates the event with a series of music, some like the ones in Seshadripuram and Chamarajapet running for over a month.

Most of the top names in the Carnatic genre, with a smple here and there of its Hindustani counterpart are billed in each one of the venues.

If distances are no criteria, the avid listener can choose his favourite artists from veterans like Nedamuri Krishnamurthy (Seshadripuram) to R.K. Srikantan (Chamarajapet). Top favourites like T.V. Shankaranarayana, T.N. Seshagopalan, Sudha Raghunathan, M.S. Sheela, Nagamani Srinath, Sanjay Subramanian, Hyderabad Brothers, Saxophone Kadri Gopalnath, Mandolin Sriniva. et.al. are common to all the venues, including the newly emerging Jayarama Seva Mandali in Jayanagar.

Phoenix's senior columnist **Kusuma Rao** here gives an impression of one particular concert which made deep impression on her. It verily paints the picture of the emerging scenario, a typical one at that.

South of the City, as we all know, is verily the cultural centre of Bangalore. I had been hankering after the celebrated Ramanavami concerts at the Fort High School Compound, Chamarajapet. So I made a bee-line to the venue one warm evening. The pavilion was fast filling up people kept pouring in. The air was vibrant with expectations. Nobody seemed to mind the sultry weather.

The star of the evening arrived punctually, gracefully took her seat on the dais and melody filled the air. With the opening Kedaragowla varnam itself, the youngster was able to create a rapport with her audience. Gifted with a rich, melodious voice, tuned to a high pitch, she created an atmosphere of 'sukhyam' which was palpable to the touch. She sailed through the concert with ease and confidence.

"Tulasidala" (Mayamalavagowla) sounded just right. An unusual kriti 'Kalyana Rama' (Hamsanada) was a refreshing change from the oft-repeated 'Bantureeti', 'Santana Rama'



Swami Ganapathi Sachidananda inaugurate the festival at the Fort Junior College, Bangalore

(Hindola Vasanta), 'Iku Swami' (Manirangu), 'Varanarada' (Vijayashree) were the other delicacies she offered.

The main raga of the evening was, however, Bhairavi—in which she sang 'Raksha Bettari', reminding one in no uncertain terms—who she was. 'A chip of the old block 'Just like Pattammal!'—were some of the delighted spontaneous comments of the audience.

Her Sadhana is rigorous and it is obvious that she puts forth every effort to reach heights. Her rich, fluent, young, happy voice and training coupled with her redoubtable lineages are complementary to her sincere dedication to the art.

That was Nityasree Mahadevan, the young melody maker and torch-bearer of the D.K. Pattammal lineage!

While the going was good, I also attended two more

concerts at the same venue. One was Kunnakudi's; the other M.S. Sheela's. About the violin Chakravathy, first. As could be expected, the pavillion was jam-packed and overflowing with fans of the super how-man. The masterly widdling of his bow seemed to cast a magic spell on his listeners. With his superb command over the instrument, he regaled us with 'Chakkaniraja' and 'Ninnuvina'. He grandly offered a choice of four ragas—Kambhoji, Abheri,

Shanmukhapriya and Ratipatipriya. He would play the raga of audience-choice—for the main raga of the day. He played Shanmukhapriya raga and 'Vallinayaka' after that. He interspersed the main raga with 'Jhanaks' from various sources—the Akashavani signature tune (in Shivaranjini), a phrase from a Purandara Dasa Devaranama 'Jagaddodharana', etc. He learnt that he sometimes includes hits of popular Hindi film hits also, just like that. For half-an-hour or so, he played



Kadari Gopalanath Guruvayoor Dorai Serkanya Ramgopal Kantakumar



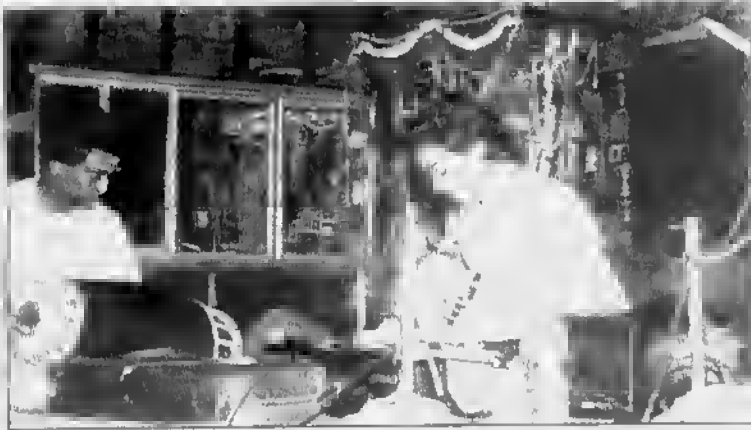
Chowdiah Awardee Kunnakudi Vaidyanath being felicitated at the Sriramseva Mandali function

Mandolin—or so, the violins sounded to our charmed ears.

Thus the great Kunnakudi had a field day at Fort High School festivities.

M.S. Sheela did not disappoint her audience. Opening her concert with a dignified Kalyani Atatata Varna—She continued her concert with Pancha Matanga in praise of Ganesha and followed it up with 'Sri Ramya Chitta' in Jayamanohari(?). The main raga of the day was





*Mandolin U. Srinivas*

Kambhoji which was classical, correct and tuneful. She sang 'Mari Mari'—a rarely heard but very interesting kriti.

It was a gratifying experience. Her 'Vidwat' and voice make for a delightful combination and one always wants to hear more.



*M.S. Sheela*



*Nityashree Mahadevan*



*K.J. Jesudas*



*Sudha Raghunathan*

## One More Honour to Srikanthan



R.K. Srikanthan

The much-decorated Vidwan R.K. Srikanthan was the recipient of yet another prestigious honour on April 2 last in Chennai. It was the honour of the Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer Trust, created in memory of the celebrated vocalist by his equally accomplished son Maharajapuram Santhanam.

The honour comprising a gold medal, a citation, shawl and Rs. 5,000 was presented to Srikanthan on the inaugural day of the four-day 14th annual music festival of the Trust. The festival was inaugurated by Mr. B.R. Kumar, Station Director of the local AIR. Veteran vocalist Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer who decorated Srikanthan with the honour, extolled the lineage, merit and personality of Srikanthan who, he said, hailed from a community

(Sanketis) which was known for its contribution in the field of music.

Four other artistes, Manakkal Rangarajan, T.S. Shankaran, T. Srinivasan and Kalpagam Swaminathan were felicitated on the occasion.

The well-attended function at Ragasudha Hall, Mylapore, was followed with a vocal recital by Srikanthan, his son Rudrapatnam Ramakanth lending vocal support. M. Chandrasekharan on the violin and Tanjavur on mridangam provided instrumental support in the concert.

**Sankranti** : In this connection, mention must be made of a similar Trust created by Srikanthan himself. The four-year old Vidwan R.K. Srikanthan Trust conducts annual music festivals during Sankranti (birthday of the renowned vocalist) every year. The fourth annual, earlier this year, felicitated six personalities in the field of music. They are : Prof. V. Ramaratnam (vocal), M.J. Sreenivasa Iyengar (veena), M.R. Doraswamy (flute), K.N. Krishnamurthy (ghatam), H.P. Ramachar (Kharajira) and B.N.V. Subramanya (pianist).

As usual, a lecture-demonstration formed part of the festival, this year's speaker being Dr. Vidya Shankar on "Thyagaraja...the Sadguru".

Besides, there were music concerts in the evenings by junior and senior artistes.

**Kumari Jaya** : Not all musical compositions are conducive for dancery elucidation. Among such compositions of Veena Valsan R.N. Doraswamy, one can't be sure how many are popular on the concert stage. But Jaya, one of the senior-most students of Jayalakshmi Alva of Mangalore, experimented with one of his Pada Varnas and straightaway made a merit of it. Neletha Ninne Kuri (Mohana) exemplifies the Virabotkhandita Nayika and Jaya's Nritta Kavyais at once revealed a steady 'chattu-metta', a discreet 'anga-shuddha' enhancing her credibility.



Jaya

Jaya's Abhinaya was equally impressive, though she seemed to draw more on the 'sancharis' than the 'sthayi'. Even here the expression fell short in its nuances like the 'Drishti' and 'shirobhedas', the former being less distinct while the latter tended to exaggerate. Yet, it must be said to her credit that the lines beginning Chalamela and Maruni Baari (ethukade) easily earned envy/irritation.

Jaya's interpretation of 'parakiya nayika' in Mugdurechi - Pilichadu (Shahana) and Vipralaksha in Sancharadullara (Ashtapadi) were as explicit in their Abhinaya, though the rapport could have been more enduring had it not been for the above shortcomings as Jaya's hasthas and sthanakas were in place right through.

Another Bharathanatyam rental in which the Sancharis had an over dose was that of Indira Kadamli, undoubtedly



Indira Kadamli



Arty Shetty, Jayalakshmi Alva and Pooja Rao, Mangalore

a bright dancer. It was again for the Every Friday Evening fare, listed for its monthly Horizon.

Indira's varnam for the day (Adi Shrivane Kanave in Thodi) saw a sparkling display of Nritta, the well-knit Kurvis executed with gay abandon. The abhinaya was equally evocative, though the Virabuthkhandita Nayika remained elusive in the 'sthayi'.

But when Indira drifted to the Padmas, it left one wondering whether the fare was a dance recital or a music concert! While the alaps were dreamily over drawn, Indira seemed at ease to emit 'sancharis' right through. At one stage even instrumental music could inspire her to portray some inexplicable emotions!

Sri Devi Nitya Kendra of Mangalore recently got up a pleasant function to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its Director Jayalakshmi Alva's "Arangetram". The senior-most student of the celebrated Dandamayudhanii Pillai, Jaya is

a respected dance teacher in South Kanara, her daughter Arty Shetty being one of her accomplished students.

The main attraction of the 180 minute function was a couple of numbers in which three generations of Bharathanatyam dancers comprising Jaya herself, daughter Arty and grand daughter Satwika Shetty danced together. In the interpretation for her renowned Guru's masterpiece Varnam "Swamyai Vara Shodhah" (Purvakalyani), it was refreshing to see Jaya delineate the complex Jambus with ease and felicity. Though out of touch for over a decade, her lines were neat and the laya limitless. Her stance was equally elegant, though short of flexuous. Her Abhinaya, however, was on a low key. Even in the pieces in which Arty and Satwika danced it was laya that lent credibility, there being little to write home about their mukhya. Perhaps the recorded music could not inspire them to emit effectively.



Magana (Arabhi) was a case in point and the kids couldn't be blamed if their narrative was inarticulate! But the Varnam Chalamela (Nattukuranji) by Dhanalakshmi was in a different tune. Her angikas stood the test of 'anga-shuddham' though her 'are-mandi' was not steady. Nor was there much variety in the adavus. Much less was there a direction in her Abhinaya, neither the mukhija nor the hasthas helping her to build-up the underlying Virahotkhandita.

The make-up in one of the pictures illustrating this column can speak for itself. Yes, it is Yakshagana accoutrement of Bharathanatyam Guru K. SHIVA RAO, Director of the Durga Parameshwari Natya Niketan of Bangalore. The school recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, no small achievement indeed. Rao has quite a few students to his credit and if R. Dhanalakshmi is an example, he is on solid ground.

Yes, Dhanalakshmi in her outing to mark the event, stood out amidst a medley crowd of indifferent talent with poise in stance and near precision in laya. She certainly shows promise. Among the others, a majority seemed below 10 years of age. But instead of strengthening their Adavus and layakari which is best suited for the age, Shiva Rao seemingly has initiated them all indiscriminately into Abhinaya, an aspect which calls for maturity. Adisilale

But she came to her own as Chamundeswari in the choreographic exposition of the epic story of that goddess. The narrative here seemed more to her liking, though as Mahisasura, Shiva Rao's Portrayal out and out exemplified the Yakshagana format, at once revealing his expertise in that familiar form.

#### Ranga Pravesha

The period saw two debuts. Of the two, Pratibha



Sridhar, student of G.S. Rajalakshmi is certainly the senior. Besides a pleasing presence, she has a keen sense of laya as evidenced in the invocatory pieces. Even the Varnam Sakhiye (Shankarabharana) sparkled with some lively Nritta, though her facial lacked conviction. But she shows promise.

Priyanka R., student of Padmini Ramachandran is equally talented. Though barely 11 years of age, she could easily negotiate some complex adavus adorning the Varnam Swaminandanam (Nattukuranji) with ease. There was poise in her stance, well grounded in the aspects of 'anga shuddham'. But her Abhinaya was no match to her Nritta, the sentiments exemplifying the lofty lyric proving beyond her comprehension. Indeed, she is too young for that, but she has the potential and that holds promise.

## Music

A highly evocative varal recital by the reputed T.V. Shankaranarayanan gave a flying start to the 9th anniversary of the Ravindranath Tagore Cultural Association, beginning May 20. The four day festival included concerts by familiar artistes like M.S. Shreela, N. Vijaya Shiva and the Priya Sisters—Shanmukhapriya and Haripriya. Devotional ditties by R.T. Nagar Ladies Association, a flute recital by young Amith A. Nadig and a percussion ensemble by the well-known Laya Lahiri of the Ayyanar College of Music formed the prelude to the proceedings each day.

As he started his preposul 180-minute concert with salutations to Ganapati, it was evident that Shanakara narayanan was in fine fettle. Familiar numbers flowed in a steady pace, each invested with sleek niraval and rullicking swara patterns. The pick of the evening, however, was a spacious alap for Kharaharapriya (Rama Neeyada). It was delightful listening, the stassis at "Kamini Vesha" leaving a lingering impact. As scholarly



was his crisp alap for Behag, orchestrated with a trite 'thanam' and a Pallavi in 'mishra'.

### Unforgettable Dwaraki

Earlier in the month, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan had billed a veena-venn-violin trio for the endowment in memory of the unfurgettable H.N. Dwarakanath. The artistes V. Desikachar, D. Balakrishna and Mysore V. Srikanth are seasoned performers. But the concert itself didn't live upto expectations either individually or in combination. It was a good selection, the celebrated Saveri varnam (Sarasuda) providing a secate start. But the later numbers sounded rather pedestrian. Only the alap for Shankarabharana (Enduku Paldala) was of some substance, redeemed to a large extent by Srikanth, the youngest of the trio, whose fertile imagination lent the raga a sensitive touch. The percussion support was in

charge of V.S. Rajagopal (mridangam) and M.A. Krishnamurthy (ghatam).

Another concert which had aroused the curiosity of the cognoscenti was that of S.P. Ramh of Chennai for the Bangalore Gayana Samaja. A student of Lalgudi Jayaraman, Ramh has a mellifluous voice, though it has yet to gain resilience, the register in Mandhara and Thaca sthayee remaining suspect. But he has a pleasant style, the Bilahari piere (Sri Balasubramanya) and Raga-Thana-Pallavi in Kalyani (Khanda) vouching for his sound grounding.

**Kavya Kaveri :** One more venture to enliven the lyrical wealth of Kannada Poetry. Vocalised by the dulcet voiced Phanivani Udayshankar, the lyrics are enshrined in a cassette entitled "Kavya Kaveri" which was released at a simple but impressive function recently. A live rendition of the select verses by Phanivani formed part of the function.

**PHOCKEX** The poet's portrait, dedicated to him, and three copper coins with more evocative writing and beautiful colour illustration. Subvina and Hood, Coimbatore will mail you.

## Song of the Smiling Countenance

—S.N. SIVASWAMY

In an earlier article in this series (Tuneful Encounters-14, "In the Music Hall by Jukka", —*Phoenix*, June 1998), I had alluded to the galaxy of musical luminaries whose performances I eagerly awaited at Bangalore's Shankarajah Hall. One of those great musicians was Musiri Subrahmanya Iyer whose dulcet voice was his greatest asset.

Musiri, whose birth centenary is being observed this year, was the gentlest of the musical celebrities whom I met in my AIR years of the early forties at Chennai. He was quiet, disciplined, punctual and very pleasant to talk to and deal with. His broadcast concerts were neat, well-timed and structurally perfect. So were his public recitals which I had earlier attended in Bangalore and later in Chennai. There was a sense of orderliness throughout and rarely any disturbing gimmick.

His wide repertoire is chiefly remembered for the many "Vilambakala Keertanas", in singing which he surpassed himself, although he might begin his concert with a "trikala vandan". One of his best renderings, in Kamadhaji, which captivated me with its intensity of feeling was "Tiruvadi Charanam ennam nannu vanden". His elaborate

treatment of Syamasastri's "Amba nannu breave" in Todi and Dixitar's "Neerajakshi Ramakshi" in Hinidalam are likewise evergreen in my memory. I recall that one of Musiri's favourite ragas was Mukhari which seemed to suit his genial style of singing.

One song which Musiri made immensely popular was undoubtedly the Abheri Kritid Thyagaraja, "Nagumomni (smiling countenance)". I had not heard anyone sing this composition before nor did I know any other composition in Abheri. It appeared to me that Thyagaraja had encoded this enchanting song "Nagumomnigalaneni" as a framework of reference for a rather obscure raga. And Musiri sang it with a special fervour required to bring out the intrinsic beauty of its appealing emotional tone.

The song was also available on gramophone records, which made it so popular that the song and its singer were synonymous at that time. Even children used to hum "Nagumomni" in our days without, of course, realising the poignancy packed into it by the Saint-composer craving for his deity's blessings.

One section of Thyagaraja's numerous compositions is classified as "Deyyanama Sankeertanala" characterised

by their simplicity of form and content. They are considered appropriate for offering as pure invocations either by individuals or groups of devotees. Musiri excelled in singing one of them in particular, the Yadhukala Kambhoji composition "Pahi Ramachandra Raghava", which again was most suitably set for his soft and mature voice.

Musiri's sweet and graceful voice, long after he has gone, reverberates in my memory, and I feel it is unfortunate there is no musician today who can recapture the soothing and persuasive effect it had on our sensibilities.

Among Musiri's disciples, Sandhyavandhanam Srinivasa Rao started working in AIR, Chennai, during my time. (Another of Musiri's disciples, T.K. Geymala Rao worked in other stations of AIR and eventually became Chief Producer of Carnatic Music in AIR Headquarters at Delhi.) I was always happy in the company of Srinivasa Rao, a fine gentleman who knew some rare Keertanas, Sahasies and Ugahlogas of Haridasas and sang them for me beautifully in their original and pristine tunes. We used to spend hours together talking of Dasa Sahitya, and, of course of Musiri Subrahmanya Iyer. □

## Musical Debut in US

Along with Bharathanatyam, it is heartening to note that Carnatic music is also gaining popularity in the States. The recent 'musical arangetram' of Kumari Deepa Ravikumar in Washington and Alabama is a case in point. The event also bears eloquent testimony to the success her Gurn, T.V. Ramaprasad has made as a teacher in America.

15-year old Deepa of Los Angeles is a sophomore at the Foothill High School in Tustin, Orange County. Daughter of Drs. G.R. and Jayanthi Ravikumar, the talented lass has a melodious voice. She was initiated into Carnatic music by Meera Balchander, continuing her lessons under Balu Parameshwaran, well-known in the Southland. Currently, Deepa is undergoing training under T.V. Ramaprasad, a leading performer and a popular teacher of Bangalore.

Ramaprasad himself is one of those young Carnatic vocalists who have succeeded in maintaining purity of the classical form through discipline, concentration and an uncompromising adherence to tradition. He has been conducting workshops and undertaking teaching assignments in the USA, UK, France, Germany, Holland, Austria and Malaysia. His



Debutante Deepa Ravikumar

recitals have been aired on the radio and television in different parts of the world. His CDs and cassettes have proved equally popular.

The Naitanta Academy of Dance and Music which he has set up in Bangalore jointly with his wife Indira Kadamhi, a noted Bharathanatyam dancer,

is a popular haunt for aspirants of both the arts.

As described by the largely-read *India Journal* of California, "Ramaprasad belongs to the new legion of musicians who are experts not only at demonstrating their art, but also in analysing the science of music".

This coverage would be incomplete if a mention is not made of the artistes who provided accompaniment for Deepa in her debut. They are Vittal Ramanurthy, a student of Lalgudi G. Jayaraman on the violin, Neyveli Narayanan, a student of Umayalapuram Shivarman on the mridangam, K.N. Prakash, a student of K.N. Krishnamurthy of Bangalore on the ghata and Chakku Hanuli, a student of Dr. Rajeev Varanasi, on the Tambura.

### Raga System

Raga means melody music or melody type. The outstanding feature of Indian music is its Raga system. Every raga is an aesthetic entity with its own local personality and is capable of being recognised by a trained ear. Some ragas are of an elaborate exposition. They are called Major Ragas. Ragas that are of brief exposition are called Minor Ragas.

—R.K. Srikantan

(Courtesy: Gayana Samrajya of the Bangalore Gayana Samaja.)

## Familiar Names in Form in Music Fest

—Kusuma Rao

A masterly veena recital by the popular teacher and senior vainika R.K. Suryanarayana brought the curtain down on the Shankara Jayanthi 'Sangretatsav' of the Thyagaraja Sangita Sabha at Vani Vidya Kendra on April 25. In keeping with the objectives of the 28-year old Sabha, only local artistes, both vocalists and instrumentalists were featured in the six-day annual, R.K.S. himself abairing the concert sessions every day.

Suryanarayana in his recital was in his elements, virtually sweeping the listeners off their feet with his virtuosity. After a spirited Vanajakshi Varna (Kalyani), he rendered a composition of his own in Sriraga. The main raga of the evening was Shankarabharana, appropriate for Shankara Jayanthi. After a

trite alap, he presented a Pallavi in Sankeerna Jati Triputa tala comprising 13 beats. Both the artist and his disciple Geeta Navle who supported him, delineated the 'Thana in turns, a real feast for the ears. Veena is best suited for Thana and when played by gifted vainikas it is a treat. While listening to this spacious treatment, one got the illusion that it was a dance recital, twenty fingers dancing on the frets and the total resonance sounding like jingling bells on the dancers' feet. Altogether it was a memorable experience, the concluding Thillana of Veena Seshanna in Behag lending a fitting finale to the rich repast.

Earlier, the concert sessions got off to an auspicious start, three Nagaswara vidwans providing the "mangala

idhwani". This was followed by concerts by juniors Chitra, Vidya, Vani and Madhu, each accounting for their good grounding in music, though they will do well to concentrate on the vital aspect of "sruti" if they want to make any headway. Going on the stage should be secondary.

Among the seniors, Haosini Nagendra made an instant appeal with her sweet voice and involunt singing. Kalyana Rama (Hamsanada) and Nannuhrova (Athana) were tidy, giving her a good start. Nidhichala (Kalyani) was particularly likeable, a neat Niraval and Swara-prasthara heightening its aesthetic lilt. The phrase "Sumati Thyagaraja" chosen for the purpose (in a GNB style) itself was challenging and Haosini accredited herself in style.

Rajnarayanan's flute recital was more repulsive and soothing. Sans gimmicks and available trimmings, it was pleasant listening. While a Navaragamalika Varnam lent him a rollicking start, Odi Baarayya (Bhairavi) was wholesome in its modal frame. The pick of the evening was Kalyani, the celebrated Nidhichala Sukhame virily reverberating with 'sulha' bhava.

Nagumani Srinath had the biggest draw which went home



G N Nagamani Srivalli





R.K. Suryanarayana

happily. She let herself soar high with Hindola, effortlessly reaching the 'thara sthayi' Nishada. Shanmukhapriya was chosen for the main raga, specially in honour of R.K.S. She recounted how he had praised her as a young girl intoning that raga in a competition years ago. The Vasudevacharya kriti also had its own significance—the presence of R.K. Padmanabha who has popularised the Veteran's kritis through his cassette series. A fitting Thillana, her own composition, was a fitting finale to the rewarding recital.

K.V. Nandakumar's Hindustani vocal recital was equally absorbing. He has a pliable voice which stays aligned to 'sruti' right through. The raags Purvi, Shahana Kamanda and Bhairavi stood out for their authentic goit. He rounded off with a couple of lingering Devaranamas.

### Vageesh in form :

Earlier, on February 15 the Saha featured K. Vageesh, inexplicably billing him as "hornadu Kannadiga". Actually, he is very much one of us. He had his initiation in music under his elder sister, H.S. Mahalakshmi of Mysore. A high official in the AIR in



Dr. K. Vageesh

Delhi today, he in a way is representing Karnataka in the Capital.

In his two-hour concert, Vageesh was accompanied on the violin by B. Raghuram, on mridangam by B.K. Chandrammali and on ghatam by K.N. Krishnamurthy.

Vageesh's choice of ragas, kritis and the blava-laden way he rendered them was indeed heart-warming. It was an enjoyable concert, many well-known local artistes having taken time off to be present—at least in part!

After a reposeful Begade varnam, Vageesh proceeded to invoke 'Girija Sita'. Ananda-Bhairavi buoyed with its proven therapeutic quality, the raga coming alive fully in his rendition. The celebrated Thyagaraja Kriti Yoga Vilahavam, with all its trappings proved highly evocative.

Upacharamu (Bhairavi), the Utsava Sampradaya kriti was too good for words. The way Vageesh drew out phrase after lifting phrase from Nishada was revealing, verily an eye-opener as to how Bhairavi could be made really exciting.

Though keeping a low profile throughout, Raghuram played with understanding, while the two percussionists outdid themselves to show off their expertise. Indeed, the foursome harmonised extremely well to make for an enjoyable musical evening.

## Promising Flutist

Sir

Master C. Chaitanya Kumar is a young flautist of great promise. I have had the pleasure of enjoying his flute display in Bangalore in October last. It was an occasion to commemorate the wedding of my friend A.P. Rao and Geetha Rao.

On the same day, a Kannada Novel 'Anantha Geetha' of Geetha Rao was released by S.S. Murthy, ex-President of Kannada Sahitya Parishat.

It was a memorable flute recital for me. I had the pleasure to enjoy it.

The young flautist showed his skill from the very commencement of the concert with the Nataraj Varna, Chalanala. The continuation showed that he had a bright promising future. He was accompanied on violin by another young artiste Ganesh Kumar who gave a good account of his prowess. Veterans Dhruvaraj and S.P. Bheemaraj accompanied him on mridangam and morsing.

Chaitanya Kumar son of C. Ramamurthy has won the first prize in flute competition for juniors conducted by the Bangalore Gayana Samaja during the 29th Music Conference. He has won the 1<sup>st</sup> Prize in junior level flute competition held at Myslapore Fine Arts, Chennai in November 1998.

### The Musical Hermitage of Kanchana

Aprons "The Musical Hermitage of Mysore" by Atri (February 1999 issue of Phoenix), I am prompted to write this piece for the readers.

Kanchana is a remote village in Puttur Taluk, Mangalore District near Bajathur. In this village there lived one Venkata Subrahmanyam, who had dedicated himself to Carnatic music. Chakrakudi Narayana Sastry, whom I knew well personally, has called him the Thyagaraja of Kanchana, while writing his profile. T.V. Gopalakrishnan called him 'A Modern Musical Saint'.

What Venkata Subrahmanyam has achieved in music is something unique transforming as he did a remote village into a place of pilgrimage for music. He has established a college of Carnatic music, Sri Lakshmi Narayana Sangeetha Shala in his premises in Kanchana. Revered D. Venkendra Heggaole of Dharmasthala has taken personal interest in being both its founder President and patron.

Ever since the demise of Venkatasubrahmanyam, his son V. Subbaramam and daughter-in-law, Rohini Subbaramam have been conducting his death anniversary as Founder's Day every year. I have been fortunate enough to participate in this function for two years

continuously during the 16th and 17th Founder's Day.

There will be a music aradhana for one full day from 7 A.M. to 7 A.M. on the next day. Each artiste is given to display his/her art for one hour. Besides participating, I had the curiosity to sit and observe the concerts for full 24 hours. This is something which I cannot forget.

The participants included (i) Sree Rangan (ii) Smt. Rangan and (iii) Sumangala Rangan. These three young sisters give both vocal and solo concerts on violin. Their participation adds vigour, concert and transports listeners to raptures of real "Bhava" samadhi in music. The three sisters are grand daughters of the Founder, Sangeetha Rathna Kanchana Venkata Subrahmanyam.

H.N. Rajanna, Bhadravati

### Enviably Wealth

Music is far greater and deeper a subject than what is presented in concerts. There are great musical compositions of high technique, aesthetic and spiritual value which may not be fit for a concert of the present day. Compositional richness is an enviable wealth in Carnatic music. They are veritable store of great ragas and the main purpose of the compositions should be to felicitate a musician to dwell deeper into the ocean of ragas.

—R.K. Srikantan

(Courtesy: Gayana Samrajya of the Bangalore Gayana Samaja.)

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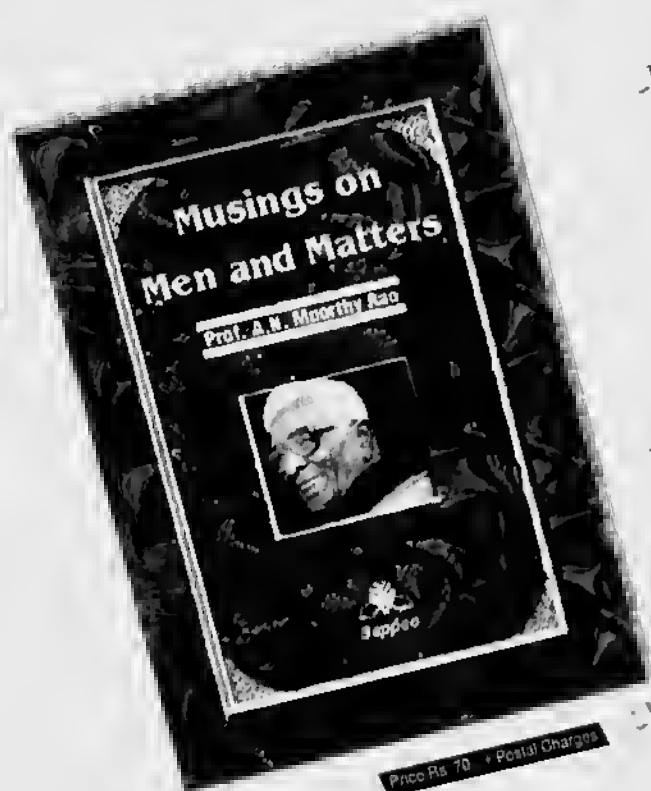


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